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PP RUQMR

DE RUSBLK #7281/1 275111Z

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FM AMEMBASSY KABUL

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5860

INFO RUHJPG/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 785

RUSBD/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 9391

RUDNRB/AMEMBASSY BELGRADE 199

RUQWRA/AMEMBASSY JIDDA 485

RUDTC/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1839

RUEHPO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 1958

RUSBAE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 7478

RUFNPS/AMEMBASSY PARIS 3385

RUQMR/AMEMBASSY TEHRAN 931

RUHQHQA/CINCPAC

BT

C N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 KABUL 7281

E X D I S

CHARGE

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CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

IE.O.12865: RDS-1 18-2-99 (PLATIN, BRUCE A.) OR-M

TAGS: PEPR PGOV PINS AF UR YP PINR

SUBJ: (C) AFGHANISTAN'S AMIN ROUP: LOCAL YUGOSLAV AND SOVIET VIEWS

1. (C-ENTIRE TEXT)

2. SUMMARY: ACCORDING TO THE YUGOSLAV AMBASSADOR AT KABUL, THE SOVIETS WERE AWARE OF A DEVELOPING TENSION BECHIEF AFGHANISTAN'S FORMER PRESIDENT MOOR MOHAMMAD TARAKI AND PRIME MINISTER HAFIZULLAH AMIN FOR "SEVERAL MONTHS" BEFORE THE MID-SEPTEMBER CRISIS THAT LED TO AMIN'S VIOLENT TAKE-OVER OF FULL POWER. THE SOVIETS DISCLAIM ANY FOREKNOWLEDGE OF THE COUP ITSELF, HOWEVER. MOSCOW APPEARS TO BE WILLING TO WORK WITH AMIN, NOW THAT HE HAS PRESENTED THE SOVIETS WITH A FAIT ACCOMPLI. END OF SUMMARY.

2. REQUESTING ABSOLUTE PROTECTION AS A SOURCE, YUGOSLAV AMBASSADOR BOGDAN MALBASIC BRIEFED THE A/DCM ON SEPTEMBER 30 ABOUT A RECENT CONVERSATION HE HAD HAD WITH SOVIET AMBASSADOR ALEXANDER M. PUZANOV CONCERNING HAFIZULLAH AMIN'S MID-SEPTEMBER COUP D'ETAT. MALBASIC EXPLAINED THAT HE OCCASIONALLY HAS LONG CHATS WITH PUZANOV, AND HAS FOUND HIM RELATIVELY FORTHCOMING IN SUCH SESSIONS. PUZANOV PROFFESSES A CONTINUING FRIENDLY INTEREST IN YUGOSLAVIA, WHERE HE SERVED FOR SEVERAL YEARS.)

4. ACCORDING TO MALBASIC, PUZANOV PROVIDED THE FOLLOWING BACKGROUND TO THE DRAMATIC POWER STRUGGLE WITHIN THE KHALQI HIERARCHY. THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HE HAD BEEN INVOLVED TO A CERTAIN EXTENT -- BUT WAS "STILL NOT CERTAIN" ABOUT ALL THE EVENTS THAT HAD ATTENDED AMIN'S TAKE-OVER. HE DISCLAIMED ANY FOREKNOWLEDGE OF THE VIOLENT SEPTEMBER 14 CONFRONTATION, AND OBSERVED THAT THIS SURPRISE DEVELOPMENT CAUGHT THE LOCAL SOVIET COMMUNITY WITHOUT ADEQUATE SECURITY PRECAUTIONS. (NOTE: AMERICAN OFFICERS SCOUTING AROUND KABUL THAT DAY WHO HAD NOTED INCREASING NUMBERS OF AFGHAN SOLDIERS AND POLICE IN THE STREETS, DID OBSERVE THAT RUSSIAN DEPENDENTS WERE MOVING ABOUT NORMALLY, AND THAT SOVIET HOUSING AREAS DID NOT HAVE ANY OBVIOUS SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS.)

5. PUZANOV TOLD MALBASIC THAT THE STRAIN BETWEEN FORMER PRESIDENT TARAKI AND AMIN HAD BEEN INCREASING OVER THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS. PUZANOV WAS CRITICAL OF TARAKI'S "CULT-OF-295#3-INDIVIDUAL" PUFFERY -- AND CITED TARAKI'S UNWILLINGNESS TO PASS THE FULL RANGE OF PRIME MINISTERIAL POWERS OVER TO AMIN WHEN THE LATTER WAS DESIGNATED AS "FIRST MINISTER." PUZANOV NOTED, FOR INSTANCE, THAT TARAKI CONTINUED TO CHAIR SESSIONS OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS -- AND THIS GREATLY ANNOYED AMIN.

6. PUZANOV RECALLED THAT THE CURRENT CRISIS STARTED AFTER TARAKI'S RETURN FROM HAVANA AND MOSCOW ON SEPTEMBER 11. AT A SEPTEMBER 12 CABINET SESSION, AMIN "INDICATED THE NEED" FOR CABINET CHANGES -- I.E., THAT MINISTER OF INTERIOR MOHAMMAD ASLAM WATANJAR, MINISTER OF FRONTIER AFFAIRS SHER JAH MAZDOORYAR, AND MINISTERS OF COMMUNICATIONS SAIED MOHAMMAD GULABZOI BE REPLACED IMMEDIATELY. TARAKI OBJECTED, TAKING ISSUE WITH AMIN OPENLY.

7. ACCORDING TO PUZANOV'S ACCOUNT, "THE QUARREL CONTINUED ON SEPTEMBER 13," AND CAME TO A HEAD ON SEPTEMBER 14, WHEN AMIN WENT AHEAD WITH AN ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT THE CABINET CHANGES. TARAKI "CALLED AMIN OVER" TO DISCUSS THAT ACT -- AND THE GUNFIGHT ENSUED. PUZANOV SAID THAT HE HAD HAD "TWO MEETINGS" WITH THE KHALQI LEADERSHIP DURING THESE CRITICAL DAYS. HE DID NOT GIVE ANY DETAILS ABOUT THE FIRST. THE SECOND WAS THE MORNING SESSION HE HAD WITH AMIN ON SEPTEMBER 15, THE DAY BEFORE THE LATTER WAS DESIGNATED AS TARAKI'S SUCCESSOR. (NOTE: THIS MEETING WAS REPORTED BY THE PRESS).

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FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5861
INFO RUWJPGAXAMEMBASSY BEIJING 8786
RUSBD/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 9392
RUDRBR/AMEMBASSY BELGRADE 0203
RUQMR/AMEMBASSY JIDDA 0406
RIDTC/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1840
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 1959
RUSBAE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 7479
RUFNPS/AMEMBASSY PARIS 3306
RUCMR/AMEMBASSY TEHRAN 032
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8. MALBASIC HAD THE IMPRESSION FROM HIS TALK WITH PUZANOV THAT THE SOVIETS FOUND THEMSELVES COMPELLED TO ACCOMMODATE THEIR AFGHAN POLICY TO AMIN'S FAIT ACCOMPLI, ALTHOUGH THEY DID NOT INDICATE GREAT ENTHUSIASM. WHEN HE COMMENTED TO PUZANOV ABOUT AMIN'S WEAK POINTS, SUCH AS HIS BAD PUBLIC IMAGE, THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR REPLIED, "AMIN IS STRONG AND WELL-ORGANIZED. OF COURSE, HE HAS SOME FAULTS, BUT WHAT LEADER DOESN'T?"

9. INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH, PUZANOV WENT ON TO COMPLIMENT THE FIRED WATANJAR AS "A GOOD MAN." (NOTE: FREQUENTLY HEARD POST-COUP RUMORS PORTRAYED WATANJAR AS HAVING SOUGHT ASYLUM IN THE SOVIET EMBASSY -- AND THE INDIAN EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT PUZANOV HAD TRIED TO INTERCEDE IN BEHALF OF WATANJAR AND THE OTHER FIRED MILITARY MINISTERS ON SEPTEMBER 14.)

10. MALBASIC GOT THE STRONG IMPRESSION THAT THE SOVIETS HAD EXTRACTED CERTAIN CONCESSIONS FROM AMIN IN EXCHANGE FOR THEIR POST-COUP SUPPORT. HE THOUGHT, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT THE SOVIETS HAD INSISTED THAT TARAQI BE KEPT ALIVE. MALBASIC OBSERVED THAT AMIN IS NOW COMPLETELY DEPENDENT UPON THE SOVIETS -- AND "MUST PAY THE PRICE."

11. MALBASIC OPINED THAT THE SOVIETS WILL NOW ENDEAVOR TO MAKE AMIN "MORE PALATABLE" AS A LEADER. FAILING THIS, THEY MIGHT CONSIDER THE ALTERNATIVES SHORT OF DIRECT MILITARY INTERVENTION, SUCH AS A QUICK COUP D'ETAT BY THE "AFGHAN" ARMED FORCES. HE DID NOT RULE OUT AN EVENTUAL RESORT TO THE USE OF SOVIET COMBAT FORCES, HOWEVER -- BUT THOUGHT IT RATHER UNLIKELY THAT THAT EXTREME STEP WOULD BECOME NECESSARY.

12. COMMENT: MALBASIC'S ACCOUNT SQUARES IN GENERAL WITH THE KEY ELEMENTS OF VERSIONS HEARD FROM OTHER REASONABLY RELIABLE SOURCES. AS CAN BE EXPECTED, HOWEVER, THE KABUL RUMOR WILL HAS PRODUCED A GREAT VARIETY OF ACCOUNTS. MOST STORIES BEGIN WITH TARAKI'S SEPTEMBER 9-10 TALKS WITH BREZHNEV IN MOSCOW. SOME SAY HE WAS THEN TOLD BY THE SOVIET LEADERS THAT HE WAS FIRED -- BUT THAT SOMBER NEWS WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO LINK WITH AMIN'S BUOYANT DEemeanOR WHEN HE RETURNED TO KABUL ON SEPTEMBER 11. OTHERS SAY THAT BREZHNEV TOLD HIM TO GET RID OF AMIN -- AND THAT HE MUFFED THE JOB. THIS EMBASSY IS INCLINED TO FAVOR THE VIEW THAT THE COMING LEADERSHIP CRUNCH WAS NOT DISCUSSED AT ALL IN MOSCOW -- AND THAT TARAKI FIRST CONFRONTED IT UPON HIS RETURN. (INCIDENTALLY, VATANJAR WAS THE SECOND-RANKING MAN IN HIS AIRPORT WELCOMING PARTY--STANDING NEXT TO AMIN.)

13. AS FOR PUZANOV'S OWN ROLE, THE INDIAN EMBASSY VERSION, TO WHICH REFERENCE WAS MADE IN A FOREGOING PARAGRAPH, NEVER HAS AN ARMED PUZANOV PARTICIPATING IN THE SEPTEMBER 14 SHOOT-OUT AT THE HOUSE OF THE PEOPLE. ALTHOUGH WE DOUBT THIS, WE DO THINK IT PROBABLE THAT PUZANOV AT SOME POINT MIGHT HAVE TRIED TO INTERVENE IN BEHALF OF THE VATANJAR GROUP -- AS HIS POST-COUP COMMENT TO MALBASIC INDICATES.

14. ALTHOUGH THERE ARE A FEW LOCAL OBSERVERS WHO THINK THAT THE SOVIETS OPT FOR TTA "IRON FIST" (IN THIS CASE, AMIN) SOLUTION WHENEVER THERE IS A TOUGH PROBLEM TO BE LICKED (E.G., THE CURRENT AFGHAN INSURRECTION), WE ARE INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT THE SOVIETS WERE PROBABLY NOT COMPLETELY IN THE PICTURE AS THEIR VIOLENT, DIFFICULT-TO-CONTROL HALQI CLIENTS STAGED THEIR INTERNAL CONFRONTATION, LIKE SCORPIONS IN A JAR. THE CONTINUED PRESENCE OF RUSSIAN WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN PUBLIC PLACES AT KABUL DURING THE DEVELOPING SEPTEMBER 14 CRISIS, AS WELL AS THE CONTINUING SOVIET MEDIA PLAY OF TARAKI'S MOSCOW VISIT AFTER AMIN'S SEPTEMBER 16 TAKEOVER, WHICH HAS BEEN REPORTED BY EMBASSY MOSCOW AND FBIS, INDICATE THAT THE SOVIETS WERE PERT OR INDEED SURPRISED.³⁰

15. PUZANOV APPEARS TO HAVE FAILED IN AN ATTEMPT TO KEEP STABLE THE POLITICAL ARRANGEMENT HERE. BECAUSE PUZANOV WAS OFTEN REPORTED TO HAVE FREQUENTLY BEEN AT SERIOUS ODDS WITH AMIN DURING THE PAST YEAR, THE LOCAL DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY IS ROSSIPING ABOUT HIS CONTINUED TENURE HERE. AN AFGHAN SOURCE, WHO HAS BEEN USUALLY RELIABLE IN THE PAST, TOLD THE A/DCM ON SEPTEMBER 27 THAT MOSCOW HAD REQUESTED AGREEMENT FOR PUZANOV'S SUCCESSOR. THE SOURCE DID NOT HAVE THE NAME. END COMMENT. AMSTUTZ

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